

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 160

By Massey

A RESOLUTION relative to training for the adult blind in Tennessee.

WHEREAS, the Department of Human Services provides vocational rehabilitation services to individuals who are blind pursuant to both federal and State law, The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Tennessee Code Annotated, Sections 71-4-601, et. seq; and,

WHEREAS, the blindness community has become increasingly frustrated on multiple levels with the quality of services being provided to persons who are blind and have expressed concerns to members of the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the most serious concern is the lack of facility-based services that allow an individual who is blind to receive comprehensive rehabilitation services on a daily basis; and

WHEREAS, the employability and independence of individuals who are blind are contingent upon such comprehensive training in adjustment to blindness, including instruction in orientation and mobility that allows an individual to travel independently, communication skill training that enables a blind person to have a written mode of communication including Braille, adaptive technology assessment and training that assist an individual to access the modern digital world, and independent living skill training that empowers an individual to live independently in their home or community; and

WHEREAS, at one point, Tennessee established a strong network of rehabilitation facilities, both public and private, across the State to provide training services to individuals who are blind, including two residential facilities and others that provided training to individuals five days per week with housing in a hotel as an option for out-of-town clients; and

WHEREAS, there is evidence that training is most successful for the blind when such individuals are immersed in their training experience in a facility environment; and

WHEREAS, currently, there are no facility-based programs providing adjustment to blindness training in Tennessee, with the only programs being ones that are virtual and/or community based, where individuals are seen infrequently; and

WHEREAS, there is no opportunity in the State for individuals who are blind to receive comprehensive training at a facility that is going to enable them to become independent blind people participating in society equally; and

WHEREAS, individuals who insist on being immersed in their training and want a facility-based program must go to Louisiana, Colorado, or Minnesota, which is costly to the taxpayers of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, very few vocational rehabilitation clients are even told that going out of state is an option, resulting in many individuals who are blind going unserved and sitting at home rather than receiving services intended to get them employed; and

WHEREAS, it is believed that the lack of facility-based services has had a negative impact on the Department of Human Services' successful outcomes with respect to individuals who are blind becoming employed; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee's neighboring states of Alabama, Mississippi, Missouri, Kentucky, Virginia, and North Carolina all recognize the importance of comprehensive facility-based services in the employment of individuals who are blind and have one or more residential facilities for the blind; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 71-4-605(b), specifically authorizes the Department of Human Services to establish rehabilitation facilities to serve individuals who are blind; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that the General Assembly expresses its commitment to

quality rehabilitation services for persons who are blind and urges the Department of Human Services to collaborate with the National Federation of the Blind of Tennessee to develop a plan for establishing a facility that provides comprehensive on-site, facility-based vocational rehabilitation services that allow the individual who is blind to be totally immersed in the training experience.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be transmitted to the commissioner of the Department of Human Services.